Security Assistance Management On Line Update

By

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and

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Security Assistance Management On Line (SAM-OC) is the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management's (DISAM) first distance learning course that was developed in 2001. In this article we will attempt to identify the target audience for the SAM-OC course, provide a progress report on SAM-OC, and describe the outlook for SAM-OC in 2004.

Is the SAM-OC course for you? SAM-OC is an entry-level course designed primarily for personnel who are new to the security assistance field, or who perform security assistance duties on a part-time basis. It provides an overview of the full range of security assistance activities, to include legislation, policy, foreign military sales (FMS) process, logistics, finance, and training management. The course offers the advantage of immediate training for employees as soon as they are assigned to a security assistance position, rather than waiting for the next scheduled DISAM resident course. SAM-OC should not be considered a substitute for a DISAM resident course, but it can be used as a precursor to any appropriate DISAM course (i.e., CONUS, Overseas, Executive, or Foreign Purchaser). If you spend more than 50 percent of your work time in security assistance, it is highly encouraged that you contact your military department's security assistance training activity to enroll in a resident course.

How successful has the course been? SAM-OC has been available since January 2002 and we have had over 260 students successfully complete the course. As mentioned in a recent article in *The Daily Record* in Baltimore, Maryland,

> The emergence of electronically mediated instruction and particularly of internet-based, asynchronous learning (anytime, anywhere) stands out as the single most important development in higher education in the last decade.

Currently more than 90 percent of public universities and 50 percent of private universities are offering fully on line classes. On line education is the wave of the future and many government agencies are aligning with civilian institutions in offering on line education as well. The US Navy has its Navy Knowledge On line (https://wwwa.nko.navy.mil), the US Army has its Army University Access On line http://www.eArmyU.com and there are many other Department of Defense organizations with websites where eligible students can enroll in courses to attain personal and professional success. In a press release by Sloan Consortium, a consortium of institutions and organizations committed to quality on line education, it stated that from Ivy League to tiny community colleges, a majority of institutes or higher education say on line learning is just as good as traditional, face-to-face classroom instruction. SAM-OC has been a successful tool at providing just-in-time training for personnel new to the security cooperation community.

Though we see SAM-OC as an excellent tool for our target audience, we would like to decrease the amount of students withdrawing from the course due to their related workload. Since we have offered this course, our attrition rate has hovered around 50 percent. Most of those who withdraw from this course say that it is too difficult to balance their job related workload with the on line course requirements. SAM-OC takes approximately thirty hours to complete. For those who have never taken an on line course, it takes a lot of self discipline and persistence to get through an on line course. Over 70 percent of the students who successfully complete our course say that they spend over an hour on line during a session.

Currently, most of our presentations have the look and feel of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. We are in the process of updating our curriculum and presentation media to reflect

a more visually oriented and interactive product. We are incorporating more graphics and animation to make the course more appealing to visual learners; re-recording audio narration with one narrator, and reducing or re-allocating text to eliminate the need for scrolling text boxes. We hope to have this new iteration of SAM-OC completely deployed by the summer of 2004.

Below is a screen shot from our current course:

This is an ideal refresher course for personnel who are returning to the security cooperation community. Students can request to be enrolled as an audit student, which alleviates the requirement to take the quizzes, but also means that the student will not receive a certificate of completion. As an audit student, one can view lessons and course material on an as needed basis.
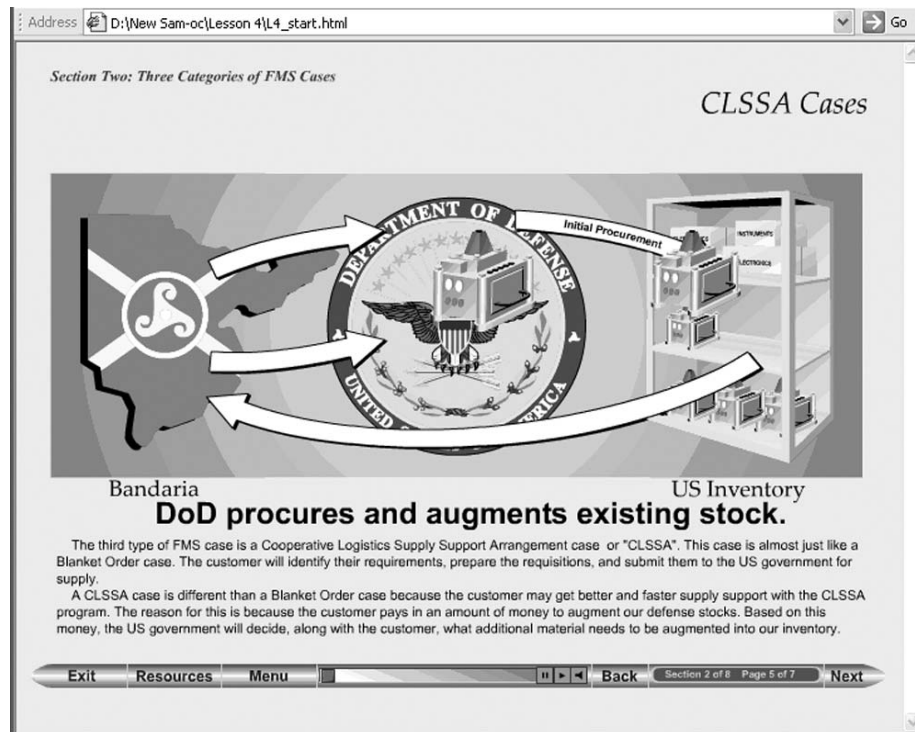
In the past year we have had questions in both our resident courses and on line course on whether SAM-OC counts toward the International Affairs certification. It depends! Probably not, except in special circumstances and each service has its unique requirements, below is a listing of military department points of contact for clarification:

- USAF: Patrick Leddin (407) 566-1662/1661;
- USN/USMC: John Hoefling (202) 764-2494 (DSN) 764-2494;
- USA: Robert Goldstein (703) 588-6575 (DSN) 425-6575, or;
- Other DoD Organizations: Lt Col Mary Street (937) 255-3529 (DSN) 785-3529.

To provide uniformity with our newest on line course, "International Programs Security Requirements - On-Line" (IPSR-OL), we have recoded SAM-OC using Macromedia Flash (http://www.macromedia.com/software/flash/). Flash allows for greater flexibility in the use of animation, development of interactivity and inclusion of multimedia content. Unlike simple HTML and JavaScript content, Flash content will automatically resize to the current resolution of the client machine, thus eliminating the need to resize browser windows or change screen resolutions. Flash is a cross-platform application, and is designed to work equally well on either Windows or Macintosh machines running Microsoft Internet Explorer, so long as the Flash browser "plug-in" is installed. Both SAM-OC and IPSR-OL will attempt to automatically download and install the Flash software if it is not already present. Some machines require

administrator privileges to install new software. If this is the case at your installation, contact your IT department personnel for assistance.

Below is a screen shot from the new iteration. Note that the display is less busy, eliminates scrolling text, utilizes animation and presents better organization:
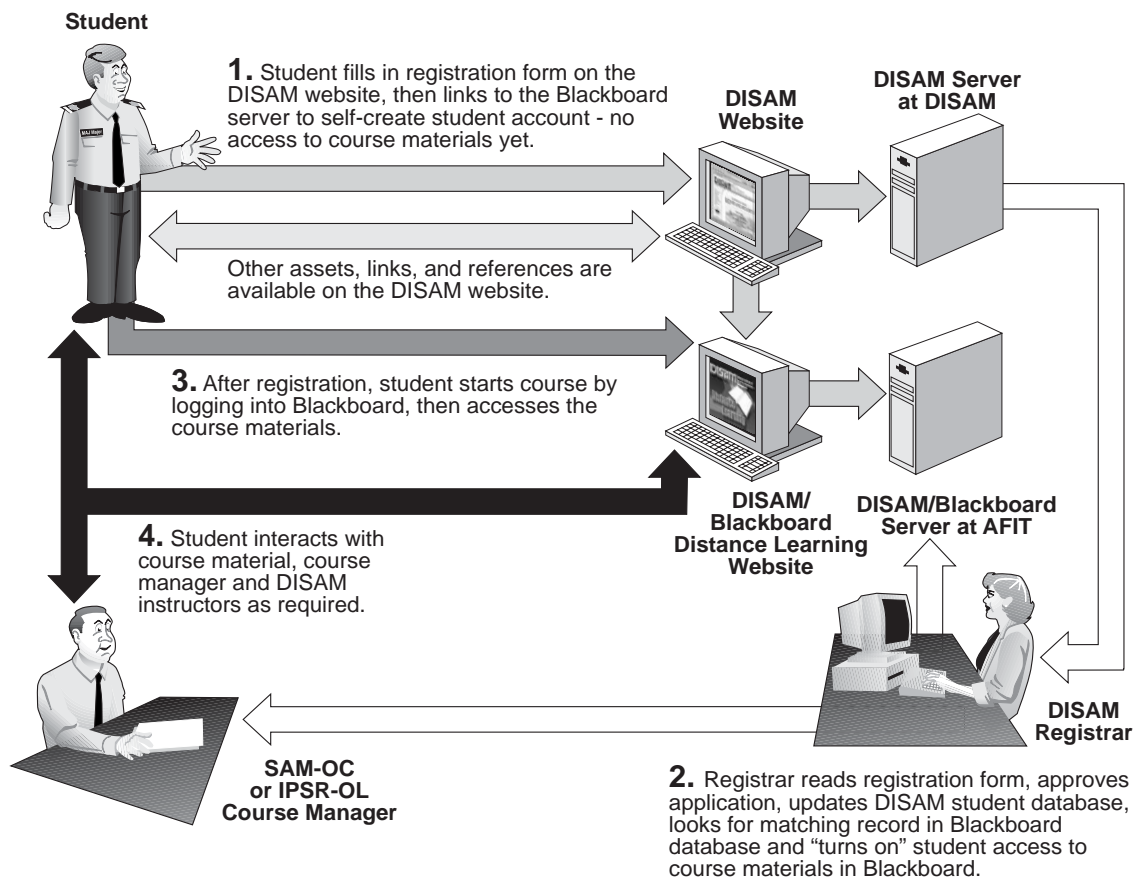

Flash content tends to be slightly more bandwidth-intensive than normal HTML files. Therefore, DISAM recommends broadband internet access for both the new version of SAM-OC and the IPSR-OL. As most government installations have broadband access, students studying from work will find the lesson files load almost immediately. Students may take the course from their home but they are cautioned that the lessons may download at an extremely slow rate if their connection is dial-up, and not broadband.

Registration for both the SAM-OC and IPSR-OL courses is a two-step process: registering with DISAM, and creating an account on our distance learning website, hosted at the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT).

• For SAM-OC, go to DISAM's home page http://www.disam.dsca.mil/DistLearn/ SAM-OC.htm and click on Distance Learning.

• Click on the SAM-OC link.

• Click on the Registrar button and fill out the registration form.

• Once completed, you will go to DISAM's Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS) site to establish your own user account and password.

The DISAM registrars will access the information you supplied on the Blackboard site, match it up with your registration request, and enable access to the course materials on Blackboard within five working days. Handling registration in this manner allows students to select their own login and password, avoids transmission of passwords via e-mail, and allows DISAM's registrars to verify student eligibility prior to beginning the course. The diagram on the next page illustrates the registration process and student interaction with DISAM distance learning.

Student

1. Student fills in registration form on the DISAM website, then links to the Blackboard server to self-create student account - no access to course materials yet.

DISAM Website

DISAM Server at DISAM

Other assets, links, and references are available on the DISAM website.

3. After registration, student starts course by logging into Blackboard, then accesses the course materials.

DISAM/ Blackboard Distance Learning Website

DISAM/Blackboard Server at AFIT

4. Student interacts with course material, course manager and DISAM instructors as required.

DISAM Registrar

SAM-OC or IPSR-OL Course Manager

2. Registrar reads registration form, approves application, updates DISAM student database, looks for matching record in Blackboard database and "turns on" student access to course materials in Blackboard.

Student feedback received on the SAM-OC course has been highly instrumental in the revision and updating process. Future revisions will continue to reflect comments submitted to better align DISAM distance learning courseware with evolving education needs in the security assistance community. For more information on DISAM distance learning, visit the DISAM website at http://www.disam.dsca.mil.

About the Authors

Lieutenant Commander Ed McFarland is an Instructor of security assistance management at the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management. He was commissioned as a Navy Supply Corps Officer upon graduation from The Citadel in 1993 and holds an MBA from the University of Phoenix. McFarland's previous assignments include: Assistant Chief of Staff for Logistics, Amphibious Force Seventh Fleet; Supply Officer, USS Germantown (LSD 42); MWR Director, Naval Medical Center San Diego; and Assistant Supply Officer, USS Duluth (LPD 6).

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